Nationalism. *Ernest Gellner*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997, 114 pp.

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Ernest Gellner's last book, *Nationalism*, was published post-humously in the final months of 1997, and provides a refinement of his erudite account of the origins of nationalism. It is his last word on this phenomenon, the study of which occupied much of his intellectual energy since his groundbreaking *Nations and Nationalism* (1983). Nationalism, according to Gellner, is a product of the forces of modernity, and is generated from a set of socio-political complexities which flow from industrial organisation. Nationalism, he argues, arises in the third stage of human history, which he calls the "scientific-industrial" stage. The two previous stages are the "hunting and gathering" and the "agro-literate." The understanding that nationalism is a modern phenomenon which is not present in the two previous stages is contextualised within Gellner's conjectural (though reasoned) history of humankind, as presented in his *Plough, Sword, and Book: The Structure of Human History* (1988). This history posits the preconditions for the transfiguration of one type of social order and its progression into another, until we arrive at the modern era. Gellner's latest work can be better appreciated with an understanding of this broader framework, which is briefly discussed in the third chapter of *Nationalism*, "A short history of mankind," but which will not be provided here for purposes of brevity.

The refinement of Gellner's ideas on nationalism can be

found in his discussion of particular "stages," "time zones," and the "stage of morality" within which it emerges. Before discussing these, he sets forth two broad scenarios, which are both particulars of a type of social order: The first is conducive to the emergence of nationalism, and the other not. In his own words, the first is one "in which a mobile anonymous mass of participants share the same "high" culture, relatively free of internal nuances, but linked to the political boundaries of the unit with which it is identified" (31). The second is "an agrarian social order in which differences and nuances of culture underwrite a complex system of statuses, but do not indicate limits of political units" (31). It is in the former ideal-type that we witness the emergence of the principle of nationalism, which holds that nation and state should coincide. Violation of this principle is a violation of the normative "right" to self-rule, or political sovereignty. The transition from the first type of order to the second is schematised in five stages. These stages are largely inspired by the Central European experience, in which the progression towards a normative formulation of nationalism emerged through specific historical eras. The first of these stages was the Congress of Vienna of 1814-1815, in which the map of Europe was redrawn following Napoleon's defeat. The last stage is the "Attainment of National Feeling," essentially the establishment of a normative order in which the citizens of any one discrete political entity "speak the same [political] language" as the citizens of neighbouring states: the language of nationalism (47). The stages in between are the "The Age of Irredentism," "The Age of Versailles and Wilson," and "Ethnic Cleansing." It should be noted, however, that not all types of nationalism necessarily need to pass through all five stages, and since reality is more complex than to be effectively explained by five-stage models, Gellner introduces the notion of time zones.

The four *time zones* of nationalism account for the variation in forms of state and culture bonds. These time zones proceed from west to east. The first time zone consists of the Atlan-

tic fringe of Europe and those societies distributed along it. These societies have had a long history of dynastic states ruling over peoples who were more or less culturally homogenous, or at least formed coherent "cultural-linguistic zones" (51) which coincided with these states, consisting of Portugal, Spain, France, and England. The coming of the "Age of Nationalism" required no great changes for these societies, since state and culture already roughly coincided. Proceeding east, we have the second time zone, in which nationalism was of a unificatory variety. The particular cases here are Germany and Italy, which already had the high cultures requisite of the national state, but had no history of state-culture congruity. The third time zone is found within eastern Europe, including those regions like the Volga bend, the Caucasus, the Balkans, and much of central Asia, where neither cultural homogeneity nor national states were ever present. In these regions, the normative "one state-one culture" model of legitimacy typical of nationalist politics would lead to a type of nation-building whereby to attain national unity, an inexorable process of ethnic cleansing would need to happen, in which a significant amount of cultural and social engineering would result in violence and brutality. The fourth time zone is that area of eastern Europe placed under Soviet influence and which developed into the successor states of the former Soviet Union. Nationalism in these locales benefitted from the Soviet defeat in the economic Cold War, and decisively contributed to the decline of communism once this happened. As we can see from this description, the varieties of nationalism differ considerably, however the mainstay of Gellner's argument is the essential modernity of the phenomenon of nationalism, for which industrial society remains ever responsible.

We are still reminded of the modernity of the whole process in his discussion of the Islamic world as constituting the fifth time zone. Throughout Islam secularisation, the separation of religion from political life, is often not seen to occur. Rather, the historic tension found in the Muslim world between "high"

and "low" variants of Islam often gives way to the establishment of a hegemony of the Islam of clerics and scholars. In other words, a normative, "high" Islamic, or the "great," tradition, as opposed to the folk tradition with its saint cults and brotherhoods, would prevail and become the normative form of political identity. The only thing essentially distinguishing the Islamic world's nationalism (by the use of the term "nationalism" in this context, Gellner presumably means "Islamic fundamentalism") from European nationalism is the lack of severance between faith and culture.

The historical circumstances leading to the emergence of nationalism are encompassed within Gellner's "stages of morality," otherwise expressed as the ethos or socio-philosophical orientations of any given period. Regardless of the various shapes and forms it may assume, or the idioms through which it may be expressed, nationalism is typical of a given stage of human history—the scientific-industrial—and of the morality of this stage. The first of these consists of the morality of "My Station and its Duties." Then comes the Enlightenment, and then the backlash of Romanticism, which is the atmosphere within which nationalism emerges in early modern Europe. My Station and its Duties corresponds to the agrarian world, and it entails that one's identity and source of fulfilment to be "linked to his occupancy of a place in a stable and hierarchical social order" (63). Neither ethnicity nor nationality are present in considerations of the legitimacy of the hierarchical socio-political order, and although cultural variation is generally present "between the various entrenched and sacralised strata," (63) such does not define the *limits* of political units, nor is it tied to any understanding of either the content or validating myth of morality. The Enlightenment was to launch an attack upon this morality, incidentally summed up by Marx in his phrase "the idiocy of rural life" (60). The universalist and individualist ethic of the Enlightenment held sacred the principle that human obligations and sources of fulfilment flow from our shared humanity, and not our status

held in place by "superstition and... phoney reasoning" (64). However, by its logic this universalist ethic, which would have us draw no objective distinction among peoples or allow no group's valorisation over another, was also offensive in its rationalisation of our shared humanity and human sentiment. Immanuel Kant's version of rationality was especially offensive in that it, for example, would have us believe that even the emotion of love amounts to benevolence for the sake of duty (66). This intrusion into realms that people hold most sacred, like personal love and self-sacrifice, would precipitate a Romanticist backlash. Romanticism, especially its political variant, "valued and praised feeling [as opposed to reason] and specificity [as opposed to universality]—above all, *cultural* specificity" (67, emphasis in original). Human relationships, and thus society, are not logically reducible to a biological organism which can be scrutinised by reason, and nor is everyone the same, but it is our diversity which is the source of our humanity. From within the Romantic age emerged the great expositors of the nationalist ideal, beginning in Germany with the poet Friedrich Schiller, and then the nationalist Johann Gottfried von Herder (66-68). The emergence of nationalism is then contingent upon, on the one hand, the transition to modernity and the logic of industrialism and, on the other, the underpinnings of the prevailing philosophical currents.

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In chapter 15, "Do Nations Have Navels?", which has its point of origin at a debate with Anthony Smith which was held at Warwick University in October 1995, Gellner assumes his stand on the question concerning the divergence between primordialists and modernists on the issue of nationalism. Modernists and primordialists operate from widely divergent premises. Modernists believe that "nations", as they are conceived by nationalists, are the product of social forces inhering in the modern world, whereas primordialists believe that nations are given, and that the differences between, and the distinctive "characters" of, nations have deep roots, which have existed since time im-

memorial. If, Gellner posits, using the Biblical analogy of Adam's navel, nations are born of the forces of modernity—as they generally are—then most nations have navels thrust upon them by their modern nationalist leaders. This is not to say that Gellner repudiates primordialism entirely. However he does point out that nations which have a genuinely historical (read primordial) navel (read existence) are few, and that European nationalist thinkers have decreed that all nations must be endowed with a navel to coincide with discrete political entities.

What, we may well ask, are the practical implications of Gellner's rather meandering thesis, or its ramifications for the modern world? Moreover, what might be the possible alternatives to a world rife with ethnic conflict, and the suffering which nationalism often entails? The world has changed, in the latter half of the twentieth century, to the point where we are left with few alternatives in dealing with this predicament. If, as Gellner suggests, nationalism is not "a consequence of some universal territorial or kin drive" (103), but is rather produced by the confluence of certain elements in the transition to the modern world, can its potential destructiveness and the suffering it brings be attenuated? Gellner answers the question in the affirmative, but suggests it would require a fair dose of cooperative political will on an international scale. An explanation of this should be contextualised within the scope Gellner's liberal-democratic ideals.

Like most conservatives, he views continuity and stability as conducive to peace. The flip side of the coin, of course, would be great social upheavals and discontinuities leading to strife which, in our modern world, often is of an ethnic variety. The strife afflicting the former Soviet or Yugoslav republics is a good example of this. Next, affluence, or the belief in its immanent arrival, largely dissuades people from engaging in "violent conduct which will disrupt their world" (106). The probability of violent conflict is much higher in circumstances where a group's situation is deteriorating, not to mention desperate.

Greater local autonomy (or cantonisation), on the one hand, and greater ultimate political units, on the other, may well simultaneously flow from advanced industrialism. The reason, partly, is that the proliferation of the know-how for creating destructive nuclear and biological weapons gives rise to a need for "effective central control [that] can avert either ecological catastrophe or the use of effective blackmail by small groups willing and able to impose terrible punishment on those not complying with their dictates" (106). Thus, "the agencies preventing nuclear and ecological disaster, controlling the drugs and arms trades, and so on, will have to be super-ethnic, while the agency administering the school and welfare system may become sub-ethnic" (107). The development of "non-territorial cultural associations" and the "de-fetishisation" of land, along with a "de-territorialisation" of nationalism are the final components of his prescription. We are left to see whether this is liable to ever occur, and we are also left wondering whether or how such arrangements could be established without actually precipitating the troubles we want to avoid in the first place.

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In the final analysis, however, *Nationalism* has many praiseworthy qualities. The central argument's clarity makes it quite appealing. At the same time, its seeming simplicity incorporates a richness of insight and explanatory skill. Gellner presents a rather complex and engrossing account of a rather complex phenomenon and problem, and succeeds. His lucid prose clearly illustrates the highly contingent nature of nationalism, and its variations through both time and space. The overall model is a coherent one which any student of nationalism would do well to take as a guide in any application to actual historical cases, and to allow to be appraised and refined through such applications.